

CPYRIGHT

CPYRIGHT

'Lucky' Survivor of Beach Fight Says 'Castro Has the Firepower'

Manuel Penabaz, 36, served as Fidel Castro's judge-advocate during the Sierra Maestra battle against Batista. He later turned against Castro and was with the Cuban invasion forces last week. He escaped by rubber raft and was picked up by a merchant vessel. He gave this account by radiotelephone to the UPI in New York.

By Manuel Penabaz
United Press International

I am one of the lucky few who got out of Cuba after last week's disastrous invasion. I was there three days. It was the MIG jet fighters, the Soviet tanks and the mortars which defeated us.

About 1500 men took part

in the invasion. Apparently only a handful managed to get away alive. There were 350 men in our group. We hit the

President turns to brother and special aide Sorensen to help him on foreign policy. Page A2.

Inter-American Defense Board bars Cuba from participating in its secret sessions. Page A9.

Cubans claim United States forces are ranging their coasts. Page A10.

beach from a Liberty ship at 3 a. m. last April 17.

Four companions and myself evidently are the only

survivors—not captured or dead—of our 350 who went in.

Shortly after we had landed, Castro's forces let go with everything they had—jets, Russian tanks and mortars.

Our 1500-man invading force was aboard six ships. We sailed from a friendly Latin American country six days before.

The first batch of men landed at Playa Larga (Long Beach) at 0300. The operation was very slow and the men were still landing at 0900, six hours later. This apparently gave Castro's men time to gather their forces and move in reinforcements.

During the landing we were subjected to all-out attack. But we kept landing.

They sank two of our ships. They were the ones loaded with ammunition for our tanks and guns.

My group managed to attain its previously determined position. We held it as long as we could shoot. We took two prisoners. They were both wounded, and we took them to our field hospital, where our own men were being treated.

Held Position 3 Days

We held our positions for three days, without eating and with a minimum of water. Here and there somebody had half a canteen, or maybe just a cupful.

After three days of fighting, it was obvious that our invasion had failed. Our commander, San Roman, gave the order to evacuate the areas. They were words we never expected to hear.

"Every man for himself!" he shouted.

We had five tanks, but they were useless after the ships carrying the ammunition for them were sunk.

Those same ships carried antitank mines we had hoped to use against Castro's tanks.

We all wore camouflage uniforms and carried M1 carbines or machine guns.

I was "chief of the legal section" with a rank equivalent to that of major. But actually we had no formal military category. There were 26 lawyers in our group. I was their leader.

On the way to Cuba some of us did not have too much confidence in the landing craft, similar to the U. S. Navy craft of World War II, that were to take us from our transport ships into shore. But they turned out to be perfect and our landing was smooth—until Castro opened up on us.

Nevertheless, we managed to repel the initial attacks in spite of our inferior equipment. We managed to destroy two of their B-26s.

But they were able to knock out our air force—composed of B-26s—with their MIG jets, their Czech anti-aircraft guns, their 50-caliber machine guns. Castro has the firepower. If the invasion did

not prove anything else, it proved that.

When the order to get out of there was given, five of us headed down the coast and, God only knows how, we found a rubber life raft. A regular Navy-type raft.

We no sooner got the raft in the water when we were discovered by some of Castro's men. They fired their 50-caliber machine guns at us but missed. We paddled frantically, and quickly put plenty of distance between ourselves and the shore. They then quit firing.

The marvelous current of the Gulf of Mexico took care of the rest.

We were picked up about 100 miles from Cuba by the freighter S. S. Louise, which was passing by.

There is one point I would like to emphasize. We were never in U. S. territory prior to the invasion.